



1890

ELEUTHERIA

by Oscar Wilde

SONNET TO LIBERTY

Not that I love thy children, whose dull eyes  
See nothing save their own unlovely woe,  
Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to know,-  
But that the roar of thy Democracies,  
Thy reigns of Terror, thy great Anarchies,  
Mirror my wildest passions like the sea,  
And give my rage a brother-! Liberty!  
For his sake only do thy dissonant cries  
Delight my discreet soul, else might all kings  
By bloody knout or treacherous cannonades  
Rob nations of their rights inviolate  
And I remain unmoved- and yet, and yet,  
These Christs that die upon the barricades,  
God knows it I am with them, in some things.

AVE IMPERATRIX

Set in this stormy Northern sea,  
Queen of these restless fields of tide,  
England! what shall men say of thee,  
Before whose feet the worlds divide?

The earth, a brittle globe of glass,  
Lies in the hollow of thy hand,  
And through its heart of crystal pass,  
Like shadows through a twilight land,

The spears of crimson-suited war,  
The long white-crested waves of fight,  
And all the deadly fires which are  
The torches of the lords of Night.

The yellow leopards, strained and lean,  
The treacherous Russian knows so well,  
With gaping blackened jaws are seen  
Leap through the hail of screaming shell.

The strong sea-lion of England's wars  
Hath left his sapphire cave of sea,  
To battle with the storm that mars  
The star of England's chivalry.

The brazen-throated clarion blows  
Across the Pathan's reedy fen,  
And the high steeps of Indian snows  
Shake to the tread of armed men.

And many an Afghan chief, who lies  
Beneath his cool pomegranate-trees,  
Clutches his sword in fierce surmise  
When on the mountain-side he sees

The fleet-foot Marri scout, who comes

To tell how he hath heard afar  
The measured roll of English drums  
Beat at the gates of Kandahar.

For southern wind and east wind meet  
Where, girt and crowned by sword and fire,  
England with bare and bloody feet  
Climbs the steep road of wide empire.

O lonely Himalayan height,  
Gray pillar of the Indian sky,  
Where saw'st thou last in clanging fight,  
Our winged dogs of Victory?

The almond groves of Samarcand,  
Bokhara, where red lilies blow,  
And Oxus, by whose yellow sand  
The grave white-turbaned merchants go:

And on from thence to Ispahan,  
The gilded garden of the sun,  
Whence the long dusty caravan  
Brings cedar and vermilion;

And that dread city of Cabool  
Set at the mountain's scarped feet,  
Whose marble tanks are ever full  
With water for the noon-day heat:

Where through the narrow straight Bazaar  
A little maid Circassian  
Is led, a present from the Czar  
Unto some old and bearded khan,-

Here have our wild war-eagles flown,  
And flapped wide wings in fiery fight;  
But the sad dove, that sits alone  
In England- she hath no delight.

In vain the laughing girl will lean  
To greet her love with love-lit eyes:  
Down in some treacherous black ravine,  
Clutching his flag, the dead boy lies.

And many a moon and sun will see  
The lingering wistful children wait  
To climb upon their father's knee;  
And in each house made desolate

Pale women who have lost their lord  
Will kiss the relics of the slain-  
Some tarnished epaulet- some sword-  
Poor toys to soothe such anguished pain.

For not in quiet English fields  
Are these, our brothers, laid to rest.  
Where we might deck their broken shields  
With all the flowers the dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls,

And many in the Afghan land,  
And many where the Ganges falls  
Through seven mouths of shifting sand.

And some in Russian waters lie,  
And others in the seas which are  
The portals to the East, or by  
The wind-swept heights of Trafalgar.

O wandering graves! O restless sleep!  
O silence of the sunless day!  
O still ravine! O stormy deep!  
Give up your prey! Give up your prey!

And thou whose wounds are never healed,  
Whose weary race is never won,  
O Cromwell's England! must thou yield  
For every inch of ground a son?

Go! crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head,  
Change thy glad song to song of pain;  
Wind and wild wave have got thy dead,  
And will not yield them back again.

Wave and wild wind and foreign shore  
Possess the flower of English land-  
Lips that thy lips shall kiss no more,  
Hands that shall never clasp thy hand.

What profit now that we have bound  
The whole round world with net of gold,  
If hidden in our heart is found  
The care that groweth never old?

What profit that our galleys ride,  
Pine-forest-like, on every main?  
Ruin and wreck are at our side,  
Grim warders of the House of pain.

Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet  
Where is our English chivalry?  
Wild grasses are their burial-sheet,  
And sobbing waves their threnody.

O loved ones lying far away,  
What word of love can dead lips send!  
O wasted dust! O senseless clay!  
Is this the end! is this the end!

Peace, peace! we wrong the noble dead  
To vex their solemn slumber so:  
Though childless, and with thorn-crowned head,  
Up the steep road must England go,

Yet when this fiery web is spun,  
Her watchmen shall decry from far  
The young Republic like a sun  
Rise from these crimson seas of war.

TO MILTON

Milton! I think thy spirit hath passed away  
From these white cliffs, and high embattled-towers;  
This gorgeous fiery-colored world of ours  
Seems fallen into ashes dull and gray,  
And the age changed unto a mimic play,  
Wherein we waste our else too-crowded hours:  
For all our pomp and pageantry and powers  
We are but fit to delve the common clay,  
Seeing this little isle on which we stand,  
This England, this sea-lion of the sea,  
By ignorant demagogues is held in fee,  
Who love her not: Dear God! is this the land  
Which bare a triple empire in her hand  
When Cromwell spake the word Democracy!

LOUIS NAPOLEON

Eagle of Austerlitz! where were thy wings  
When far away upon a barbarous strand,  
In fight unequal, by an obscure hand,  
Fell the last scion of thy brood of Kings!

Poor boy! thou wilt not flaunt thy cloak of red,  
Nor ride in state through Paris in the van  
Of thy returning legions, but instead  
Thy mother France, free and republican,

Shall on thy dead and crownless forehead place  
The better laurels of a soldier's crown,  
That not dishonored should thy soul go down  
To tell the mighty Sire of thy race

That France hath kissed the mouth of Liberty,  
And found it sweeter than his honeyed bees,  
And that the giant wave Democracy  
Breaks on the shores where Kings lay couched at ease.

SONNET

On the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria.

Christ, dost Thou live indeed? or are Thy bones  
Still straightened in their rock-hewn sepulchre?  
And was Thy Rising only dreamed by her  
Whose love of Thee for all her sin atones?  
For here the air is horrid with men's groans,  
The priests who call upon Thy name are slain,  
Dost Thou not hear the bitter wail of pain  
From those whose children lie upon the stones?  
Come down, O Son of God! incestuous gloom  
Curtains the land, and through the starless night  
Over Thy Cross the Crescent moon I see!  
If Thou in very truth didst burst the tomb  
Come down, O Son of Man! and show Thy might  
Lest Mahomet be crowned instead of Thee!

QUANTUM MUTATA

There was a time in Europe long ago,  
When no man died for freedom anywhere,  
But England's lion leaping from its lair  
Laid hands on the oppressor! it was so  
While England could a great Republic show.

Witness the men of Piedmont, chiefest care  
Of Cromwell, when with impotent despair  
The Pontiff in his painted portico  
Trembled before our stern ambassadors.  
How comes it then that from such high estate  
We have thus fallen, save that Luxury  
With barren merchandise piles up the gate  
Where nobler thoughts and deeds should enter by:  
Else might we still be Milton's heritors.

LIBERTATIS SACRA FAMES

Albeit nurtured in democracy,  
And liking best that state republican  
Where every man is Kinglike and no man  
Is crowned above his fellows, yet I see  
Spite of this modern fret for Liberty,  
Better the rule of One, whom all obey,  
Than to let clamorous demagogues betray  
Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.  
Wherefore I love them not whose hands profane  
Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street  
For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign  
Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honor, all things fade,  
Save Treason and the dagger of her trade,  
And Murder with his silent bloody feet.

THEORETIKOS

This mighty empire hath but feet of clay;  
Of all its ancient chivalry and might  
Our little island is forsaken quite:  
Some enemy hath stolen its crown of bay,  
And from its hills that voice hath passed away  
Which spake of Freedom: O come out of it,  
Come out of it, my Soul, thou art not fit  
For this vile traffic-house, where day by day  
Wisdom and reverence are sold at mart,  
And the rude people rage with ignorant cries  
Against an heritage of centuries.  
It mars my calm: wherefore in dreams of Art  
And loftiest culture I would stand apart,  
Neither for God, nor for His enemies.

THE END